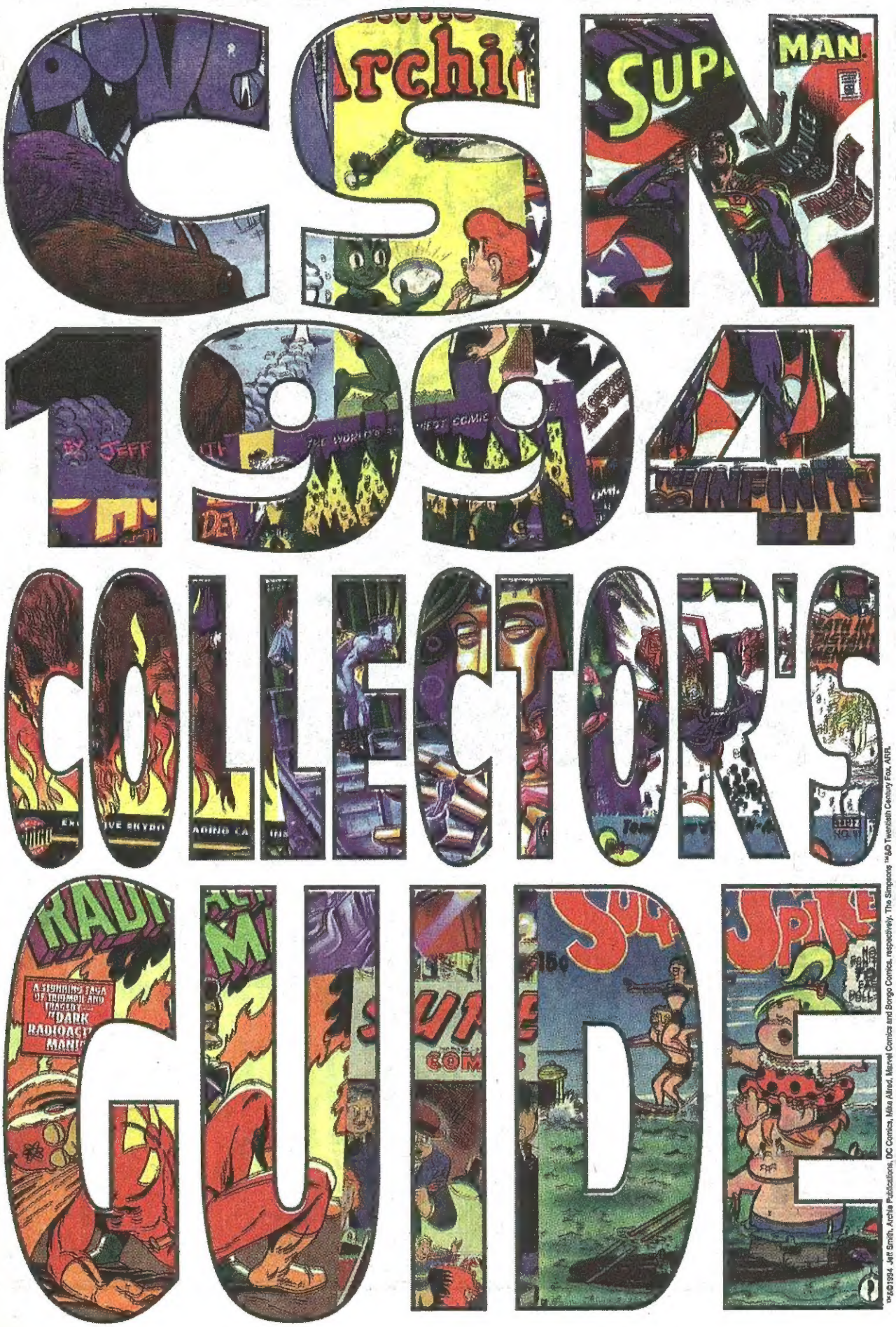

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CSN 1994 COLLECTOR'S GUIDE

Introduction

If you're just now becoming a comic book collector, you're about to discover one of the most interesting of all collecting hobbies. There are thousands upon thousands of comics collectors all over the world who share your interest in comics with you, people who share your enthusiasm for comic books as a form of entertainment—and as a collectible hobby.

Collecting comics has obvious advantages over collecting stamps or coins (the only two collectible hobbies with more enthusiasts than comic book collecting). With stamps or coins, virtually all you can do is collect; you can't read your stamps or your coins and enjoy them—you can simply look at them, keep them organized, and file them away.

If you're a new comics collector this year, you probably have a lot of company; in the past year, thousands of new readers have become collectors, joining the ranks of those who have been enjoying comics for years (for decades, even)! In the past year, the number of speculators (people who buy comic books only in hopes of making money later on) has decreased, but not the number of collectors (those who actually enjoy reading comic books).

Even better, 1994 offers fans more variety than at any time in history. There are comics for almost every taste and interest, offering enjoyable reading for collectors of all ages.

If you're new to the hobby, this publication will certainly help make your transition from reader to collector a smooth one. If you've been reading and/or collecting for a while, you should still find some interesting tidbits to enhance your enjoyment of this hobby. The *1994 CSN Collectors' Guide* is brought to you by the friendly folks at the comic shop where you picked this up; they've invested in this publication so that you can have more fun collecting comics; most of those folks are collectors and readers themselves, and they want you to share in the fun.

The first segment of the guide will give a little background on comics collecting, along with some tips about how to collect, how to organize your collection, how to grade your collection, etc. There are a lot of you who are just now getting into the fascinating hobby of comics collecting, and we're hoping this *Guide* makes it easy for you to become a collector.

The second segment of the book will update you on just what the various comic book companies are doing and on what you should look for in your collection. We'll also give you a little background history on most of the major companies in the field, just to let you put everything in perspective.

Your local comics shop--the place where you picked up this *CSN Collectors' Guide*--is your best collecting resource, of course. As we said earlier, they made this *Guide* available to you because they have a genuine interest in comics and in collecting, so if you have any questions--or if you feel so motivated after reading all this that you're ready to venture into the world of comics collecting--talk to the people at your local comics shop (and be sure to mention the *CSN Guide*!).

Another valuable resource to you as a comics collector is *Comic Shop News; CSN* is the largest-circulation ongoing comics news publication in the field, and it's available only through comics specialty shops like the one where you got this *Guide*. Each week, we bring the you latest in news from the field, spotlights on major new projects, reviews of upcoming works, interviews with some of the industry's most talented and fascinating professionals, and a checklist of books you can expect to see in your comics shop for the next few weeks. If your local shop is running out before you can get your copy of *Comic Shop News*, be sure to let them know--we don't want anyone to do without!

Now, on to the *5th Annual Comic Shop News Collectors' Guide*. Happy Collecting!

Cliff Biggers & Ward Batty -- editors

Glossary

A problem with any new hobby is learning the proper terminology; comics collectors have several unique terms that are a part of the hobby. Let's look at some of the terms you're likely to find used in the field of comics collecting, and explain just what they are.

Acid-Free: a special designation of comic book backing board or paper; most papers feature sulfuric or other acids, which can cause comic book paper to yellow or turn brittle in time. Acid-free supplies are pH neutral so that they do not cause additional deterioration; some acid-free printing papers are also available, but no comic book publishers have thus far made use of them.

Adaptation: A comic based on someone else's work; very often, an adaptation is a comic book version of a novel, film, poem, opera, etc.

Anthology: An anthology is a comic book that contains several different unrelated stories, usually by different creative teams.

Ashcan Edition: Originally, this was a sample copy prepared for office use but never intended to be sold. Nowadays, several publishers use the term to refer to a very small run of a comic, usually xeroxed, that is privately distributed to friends, reviewers, etc. Some publishers also use "ashcan edition" to describe small promotional samples of upcoming comics distributed at conventions, as giveaway bonus items, etc. In some cases, an ashcan edition is also a signed limited edition.

B&W - Black and White, a popular printing method for many comics from a variety of independent publishers. Most B&W titles do still have color covers, however.

Biweekly: Published every two weeks; some publishers use this to mean published twice a month, but there really is a difference--about two issues a year worth. *Marvel Comics Presents* is the most successful biweekly

Bookshelf Format - Marvel's name for the squarebound, heavy-paper, high quality format that originated with *Dark Knight* from DC. (see *prestige format*)

Chromium Covers: A deluxe process that imprints the cover art on a colored metallic foil sheet rather than printing it in standard ink on paper; this gives it a high-gloss metallic look that no normal printing process can duplicate. *Bloodshot #1* was the first comic to feature such a cover; other publishers have made use of the technique since then.

Colorist: The person who adds the color to the comic art, working from photostats (that's why the original artwork is still in black-and-white). Color can be done with a limited palette using flat colors; it can be painted in a variety of media; or it can be done via computer coloring programs. Computer coloring has become much more popular in recent years because it allows colorists to offer much more sophisticated visual effects and much more lifelike color; Image Comics is well-known for their stunning use of computer coloring. Coloring a comic is not as easy a job to color a comic as you might think; see *Four-Color* for more details.

Comics Code Authority: An industry regulation group created in the 1950's to make sure that comics adhered to a very strict code of morals and values--this came about largely because of fears of industry regulation due to the uproar caused by an "expose" of comics entitled Seduction of the Innocent. The CCA, or the Code, has become significantly more permissive in recent years, and has significantly less clout than it once did. You may still find their stamp of approval on the cover of many comics, however. Very few new publishers submit their comics to the CCA for approval; Marvel, DC, and Archie remain the most active publishers who utilize the Code's services. Books that carry the CCA's stamp are often referred to as "Code-approved."

Continuity: Making the events of a comic fit in with the events of other issues of the comic; making sure that characters, backgrounds, settings, etc., are consistent (just as they would be in the real world). Many fans are very aware of continuity, and spend a lot of time looking for comics stories that seem to violate continuity. The older a title is, the more continuity it has--and the more likely an author will either intentionally or accidentally violate that continuity if he doesn't have a perfect memory of everything that's happened in that character's adventures before.

Crossover: A story that features characters from another title appearing as guest-stars. Some crossovers are just guest-starring appearances, while some of them actually begin in one book and continue into another. Some series, such as *Infinity Gauntlet* and *War of the Gods*, feature a great many crossovers in addition to the regular series. Inter-company crossovers bring together characters who are normally published by different companies; some inter-company crossovers, such as the *Batman-Punisher* and *Punisher-Batman* DC-Marvel crossover, are very popular with fans who enjoy seeing how characters from different continuities interact.

Deluxe Format: DC uses this name to indicate its Baxter-book line of 32-page comics on better quality paper. Other publishers interpret this to be the same as Bookshelf Format or Prestige Format--my, this industry loves names, doesn't it?

Die-Cut: Using a metal die to cut away a selected area of a cover; this can be use for a variety of effects, such as the "clawed cover" of *Wolverine #50* or the skull-shaped cut-out on *Punisher/Archie: When Worlds Collide #1*. Publishers can also die-cut an entire comic, as Malibu did with *Protectors #5*.

Direct Distribution: Comics that are sold directly to specialty distributors for resale to specialty shops, which sell those books to fans who are tired of haunting the local convenience stores. This system is "direct" because the unsold books cannot be returned by the stores if they aren't sold, making it a direct sale for the publisher; also, this system tends to leave out some middleman steps, getting the books to your comics specialty shop very quickly. Recently, some publishers have begun placing UPC codes on direct books, but these codes still designate the book as a direct-sales copy. Ultimately, direct-sales and ID copies have the same value, so long as both books are first first printings. Phil Seuling is generally credited with creating the framework for today's direct market--a market that makes it possible for you to read this *CSN Collector's Guide*, among other things.

Duotone: Black plus one other color, used as an accent color. Tundra's original *Madman* title is one example of duotone.

Enhancements: The use of extras such as multiple cover, foil embossing, die-cutting, metallic inks, trading cards, pop-ups, etc., to increase fan interest. Most enhancements are added to the cover, since that's the first thing you see when you're browsing the racks.

Fair: See our comics grading guide elsewhere in this issue for more information; basically, this is a book showing a fair amount of wear, but still readable and complete.

Fanzine: A fan magazine; this is where a lot of today's pros got their early starts. Usually, fanzines are not comics, but are *about* comics.

Fill-In: An issue of a book done by some creative team other than the regular team; also, an issue of a comic book that does not fit in to regular story continuity. Many companies keep fill-in stories on hand just in case someone misses a deadline and doesn't finish an issue of a comic book in time.

Fine: See our Comics Grading Guide for more information; this is a book that is in very desirable condition, but having slight signs of wear.

First Printing: The original edition of a comic book. Some successful titles are reprinted, but the first printing is the most desirable. To make sure that fans can tell first printings from later printings, many publishers use different ink colors on the covers of their later printings; others place a Roman numeral on the cover to designate which printing it is.

Flaking: A problem with some older comics, particularly early Marvels; small pieces of the outer edge of the cover tend to chip or flake off. This can also happen to older books that have turned brittle with age.

Flexograph: A printing method that uses flexible printing plates rather than the more rigid plastic or metal plates; while early experiments with comic book flexo printing weren't wholly satisfactory, flexograph has improved in quality a great deal in recent years, however; many fans can't tell the difference between a flexograph and a letterpress book. For instance, *CSN* switched to flexo printing in 1993, greatly enhancing the look of the publication.

Foil embossing: the application of a metallic foil on a printed image to create an eye-catching design. *Avengers #360* made use of a solid embossed foil cover to catch readers' attention; DC's *Trinity #1* featured a colored foil background; some books have used multiple foils for even more striking effects.

Four-color: The way most comics are printed. Virtually every color you see on a comic book page is a combination of only four colors of ink: yellow, red, blue, and black. When all you can work with is the basic four plus a limited number of combinations, you have to be pretty imaginative--that's why colorists are in such demand in the comics field. Occasionally, a publisher will use an extra color of ink—a metallic ink, for example. (Fluorescent inks, glow-in-the-dark inks, and foil stamped designs are also used on occasion to add variety to a cover.)

Golden Age: The first great period of comics, usually considered to run from 1938 to the last year or so of the 1940's.

Good: See our Comics Grading Guide in this issue for more information; this is acceptable condition, showing a moderate amount of wear, but still solid and complete.

Graphic Album: a larger book presenting several comic-format stories in one collection. These may be individual stories, or they may be one long story. Usually, a graphic album has higher production values than a comic book.

Graphic Novel: a full-length story printed in graphic album format; usually a graphic novel is an original story, whereas graphic albums are often reprintings. Since many publishers use these terms interchangeably, though, you have our permission to be confused.

HC: Hardcover, usually clothbound (but not always--sometimes hardcover books use pressed cardboard covers with coated paper binding, while some deluxe books are actually leather-bound); a more durable format for books that deserve to last for a while.

Hologram: a three-dimensional photo image of a sculpted or multi-layered design; these holograms are often applied to the covers of comics book (as is being done with last year's *X-Men* Anniversary Issues) or issued as premium trading cards.

Holographic (or Holografx) foil: a special foil designed with a holographic three-dimensional pattern imprinted upon it; it is often used as a background foil for comic book covers.

Horizontal Trade Paperback: This a trade paperback that is much wider than it is tall (usually used for comic strip reprints, since comic strips are published in a horizontal format).

ID: Books that are distributed through the non-specialty distribution system just like most magazines. These books usually go on sale later than the comics you find in your friendly neighborhood comics shop—and many of the books found in your comic shop aren't available at all through ID distributors (see, you knew there were plenty of good reasons to shop at your local comic shop, didn't you?...).

Illustrated Novel: A text novel that has a number of illustrations; this is not a comic book, although often comic illustrators are used to do the art for illustrated novels.

Independent: a comics company that does not distribute its books via the ID system, but relies on the comics specialty market direct distribution system or some other alternative system. Originally, independent publishers were thought of as small, second-class publishers, but the incredible growth of such independent companies as Image proves otherwise.

Inker: the person who finishes the pencilled artwork, often adding details, background, and other elements to the work; virtually every inker has his own style, and different inkers can give the same penciller's work a very different style. The inker is *not* the colorist (this is a common mistake among novice comics fans).

Issue: the number of a comic book, usually found on the front cover. Comics are generally designated by issue numbers, not by publishing dates.

Layouts: Basic page designs, done in rough pencilled format by an artist who leaves the finished pencils to be completed by someone else.

Letterer: This is the person who adds the word balloons, complete with dialogue, and the sound effects to a comic book. It's nowhere nearly as easy as some people think--and nothing can ruin an otherwise-good-looking comic quicker than bad lettering. Some books are making use of computer-generated lettering that is almost indistinguishable from hand-lettering—a far cry from the crude typed lettering (credited to "A. Machine") that Charlton Comics used in the 1960's.

Licensed Book: A comic that uses titles, concepts, or characters from another source (usually a film adaptation). Licensed

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books have become phenomenally popular in recent years, with such titles as ***Aliens, Predator, Viper, Beavis & Butt-Head, Ren & Stimpy, The Shadow*** and ***Doc Savage*** being licensed from film, television, and pulp adventure source material.

Limited Edition: A book with a set number of copies available; in some cases, each copy is numbered, making it a numbered limited edition; in some cases, each copy is signed by one or more creators, making it a signed limited edition. Because the number of available copies is limited, a limited edition usually sells for more money, sells out quickly, and increases in value.

Limited Series: a comic book series with a pre-determined number of issues; if it's six-issues or less, it's often called a mini-series, whereas eight, ten, or twelve issue limited series are often called maxi-series. Prior to the past decade, books with four or six issues were usually called failures.

Mando Paper: A slightly whiter grade of newsprint used on some comics. Mando paper usually makes the colors more bright and holds the ink a little bit better than newsprint.

Manga: Japanese comics; thanks to Viz, Antarctic, and Dark Horse, American comics fans now have the opportunity to read several Japanese manga very regularly. Other comics have begun offering these reprintings of Japanese comics as well. Manga tend to have less action per 32-page issue than American comics, but that's because the Japanese don't think in terms of 32 page issues; their comics tend to be much longer than American books.

Maxi-Series: See Limited Series.

Mini-Series: See Limited Series.

Mint: A perfect condition comic book; a mint book looks like it just came off the stands--sometimes even better, since many of the books you find on the stands aren't really mint. (See the Comics Grading Guide for more information).

Monument Set: Think of it as unstapled comics... sort of. Monument Sets are individual comic-sized sheets, printed on both sides, that present a comic book story; Ominous Press is the first company to experiment with Monument Sets.

Mylar: A very inert plastic compound used for some comics bags; mylar doesn't yellow and is more stable than most plastics--but it also costs more. Mylite is nothing more than lightweight, thinner Mylar; it has the same archival properties, however, making it great for protecting comics without breaking your budget.

Near-Mint: Almost perfect condition, with only the most minor and insignificant of defects (see the Comics Grading Guide for more info).

Newsprint: the standard pulp-based paper that most major comics companies print their books on; newsprint yellows quickly, is fairly porous, and often turns brittle with age--but remember, when the publishers first started doing comics on this stuff, they really didn't think we'd all be collecting this stuff years later.

Novelization: The adaptation of a comic book or a film into a novel; ***The Death and Life of Superman*** by Roger Stern and ***Knightfall*** by Dennis O'Neil are two examples of novelizations of comic book stories.

One-Shot: A single-issue title; the shortest mini-series of all.

Original Art: The actual pieces of art done by the penciller and inker that are used to reproduce the comic book. Many collectors like to own pieces of original art from their favorite comics--and many comics artists make their art available for sale for just this reason. Original art is a one-of-a-kind collectible, which makes it very valuable--and, depending on the artist, very expensive.

Penciller: The creator who does the pencilled illustrations for the comic book, which he may render in ink himself or he may turn over to another person to ink.

Plotter: The creator who comes up with the basic plot idea--but not the finished dialogue.

Polybagged: A pre-bagged comic; some publishers release certain books in factory-sealed plastic bags; in many cases, these books are most valuable when left still sealed in the original bag.

Polyethylene & Polypropylene: Two common types of plastics used in inexpensive comics storage bags. Polypropylene is somewhat brighter and more eye-catching, while polyethylene is a bit more translucent. Both plastics are acceptable for comics storage, although each has a tendency to yellow or deteriorate with age, and neither is as stable or protective as Mylar.

Poor: Not really collectible at all, this is a very worn and damaged copy of a book that is complete--but that's about all you can say for it. See the Comics Grading Guide for more information.

Portfolio: A collection of several higher-quality art prints offered as works of art; most portfolios are full-page illustrations, usually offering higher-quality artwork and better printing quality. Some portfolios are signed or numbered.

Poster: a mass-produced larger drawing, usually sold at a fairly low price. Don't confuse a poster with a print.

Prestige Format: The most common name for the high-quality format also known as the bookshelf format; it's a squarebound book on heavier paper stock with higher print values, often utilizing computerized or painted color (so why can't these guys agree on one name?).

Print: A higher-quality art reproduction, usually sold individually. Prints are done on better paper than posters, using better printing methods, and as a result generally cost more. A few publishers are offering special artist-quality types of prints, such as collographs and serigraphs. Some less-than-scrupulous publishers use the term "print" when they mean "poster," though.

Reprint: A later printing of a comic book done to meet demand or to make that book available to a new audience. Some reprints are facsimile reprints, looking just like the original books; others utilize new cover art and other repackaging techniques to make the reprint more appealing to a contemporary market. Reprints are a great way for fans to enjoy valuable, hard-to-find comics without spending a fortune on them.

Scripter: The creator who writes the more detailed story and dialogue for a comic based on someone else's plot idea.

Series Within a Series: A self-contained storyline that is published as part of an ongoing series; for example, ***Batman: Legends of the Dark Knight #6-10*** encompass a series subtitled Batman: Gothic, with ***Batman: Legends of the Dark Knight #6*** serving as the first issue of the mini-series, etc.

Silver Age: The renaissance of comics, generally considered to begin around 1958 and last until the late 1960's. This is the time when superheroes returned to a predominant position in the comics universe.

Specialty Shop: A comics shop like the one where you got this ***CSN Collector's Guide;*** a specialty shop offers a wide range of comics and comics-related items that you can't find anywhere else.

Speculation: Buying comic books for investment purposes rather than for enjoyment; speculators are hoping they can guess what will be popular before everyone else decides they like it. Done right, speculation can be very profitable; done wrong, it can be very expensive.

Spine: The left-hand edge of a comic book, where the pages are joined together. Some spines are wraparound, meaning they consist of larger sheets folded in half and stapled, while some are squarebound, meaning they consist of smaller groups of pages glued or stapled together to form a square edge.

Spine Roll: a problem often caused by folding comics back as you read each page; The back of the spine tends to curl forward to the front of the book, making the pages no longer line up properly and causing excessive spine wear.

Story Arc: a storyline of predetermined length, usually marketed as a complete storyline on its own, that actually appears as a segment of an ongoing series. Often, various story arcs are prepared by different creators, as is common in the pages of ***Legends of the Dark Knight*** and ***Spider-Man***. (see Series Within a Series). The ***Superman*** books have popularized the concept of story arcs that extend from one title to another related title.

Tie-Ins: Books that contain stories that relate in some way to another series or story.

Trade Paperback: a larger paperback edition of a comic or a comics series, usually a reprint volume; some publishers use trade paperback as a synonym for graphic album, while others use it to mean a reprint volume that collects more pages than an average graphic album. No one said all these terms were always specific...

Undergrounds: Comics published by alternative smaller publishers that often deal with drugs, sex, politics, religion, or counter-culture subjects. These were very popular in the 1960's, but there are virtually no undergrounds published today. These books were often referred to as "comix," to differentiate them from comics.

Variant Covers: A recent phenomenon, this refers to a totally separate cover illustration that is available only on a small percentage of copies of the book's total print-run. These editions are desirable to many collectors because (a) there are fewer copies of them, and (b) they want to have every variation of a given book.

Writer: The person who plots and scripts a comic book.

A Final Word: The comics market is an experimental and often innovative field; as a result, you may find reference to various terms in the pages of ***Comic Shop News*** and other comics-related publications that you can't find in this handy glossary. If any term doesn't seem clear to you, talk to the folks at your local comic shop (the same place where you got this ***CSN Collector's Guide***); they can clarify these terms for you and making you a wiser collector.

Grading

SO HOW MUCH IS IT WORTH?

One question that all fans wonder about is "how much is this book worth?" When you're just starting to collect, the value of the books you're buying can be very important--the saying "so many books, so little money" is an all-too-true part of the beginning collector's life. (Just in case you're wondering, it's just as much a problem for the veteran collecter, who finds himself craving much more expensive, harder-to-find back issues.)

Once you've decided just what it is you're going to collect, you have the problem of deciding just how much you can afford to pay. One factor that will certainly influence price is the condition of the comics you collect.

When you first started reading comics, you probably didn't bother to take care of them; they showed signs of wear at the spine, the pages got dog-eared, you may have even written your name in the book or rolled it up to put it in your pocket. When you were just buying a book to read and then throw away, all this was fine. As a collector, though, you're looking at comics totally differently.

No one wants to buy a car with a dent in it unless the price is low enough to make it worth taking the damaged car instead of an undamaged one. It's the same with comic books: everyone wants comic books that are ***mint,*** or in perfect condition. In coin-collecting lingo, from which we borrow the term ***"mint,"*** the word means "a coin that has just come from the mint and is uncirculated." For all intents and purposes, that is what a mint comic is: a book that is uncirculated (virtually), in the same shape that it was in the day it went on the rack. Don't let people tell you that a book is "mint for its age." ***Mint*** is an absolute term--it means ***perfect in every way,*** and the grade doesn't lower its standards for older books. That's why older books are so valuable in mint condition--it's so very, very hard to find them in that shape. Currently, mint copies of Golden Age and key Silver Age books are very desirable because these books are very old and predate organized comic collecting (which means that no one anticipated the value this books would accrue). Some mint books go for many times the guide-listed price because of their rarity in that condition.

For all intents and purposes, most collectors' comics are graded between ***fine*** and ***near-mint.*** ***Near-mint*** is just what it says: almost, but not quite, mint. It may show very, very slight signs of reading--but not signs of wear. It may be a little less glossy, or it may show its age a little bit.

A ***fine*** condition book shows a few signs of wear, but they have to be very minor. For the uninitiated, a fine condition book looks "like new." A comics collector will notice the little bit of wear on the spine or the outer edge, a little rounding of the outside corners, etc. This is still a very, very good grade of book, and for many collectors, ***fine*** is a perfect compromise in the battle between perfect condition and cheap price.

Very good is a bit lower in grade than fine. A very good book is complete, solid, and very presentable, but it has some signs of wear. A very good book will not have any tears in the cover, missing staples, rolled spine, or writing on the cover, however. Very minor spine wear, a little minor scuffing, stress lines, etc, are very common on very good books.

A ***good*** book is just that: it's good, but it's not great. A good book is complete, all the pages and the cover are attached and are tight, there are no rips in the book and no pieces missing, but it's probably less glossy, showing more wear and age than a fine book. Good books are the books you often find at flea markets and in relatives' attics; they've been read and they show it, but they're still complete, solid, and readable. A good book should have interior pages without extreme yellowing, and it shouldn't have a strong musty or moldy odor; these smells are signs that the book has begun to deteriorate. (Unfortunately, many new collectors assume that if everything is there, a book is mint; as a result, novice collectors often overrate the condition of their comics. Good is a very common condition in which older comics are found--in fact, it's very hard to find older books in significantly better grades than this.)

Fair condition books are about as low as a collector wants to go. These books are pretty rough copies. They may have some minor tears in the cover; some of the interior pages may be torn or worn (but no pages can be missing). There may even be some small pieces of the cover or outer edges of the pages missing from wear, some dirt or grime on the cover, and some obvious spine rolling, but the book is still complete and readable. This is not the kind of book you'll rush out to show your friends once you acquire it, but it will allow you to have a valuable book in your collection at a less-than-valuable price.

Poor condition books are poor, and that's all there is to it. This is the kind of book you'd think twice about owning at any price. It may have a great deal of writing on the cover or interiors; it may have large tears or holes in the book; it may have bad wear on the cover that actually obliterates segments of the cover; it may be separated at the spine. A poor condition book should have all its pages unless otherwise noted, but that's about all it has going for it.

What happens, all too often, is that a collector bases the value of his collection on the ***mint*** value of the books, but he buys only ***good*** or ***very good*** condition books. Don't fool yourself. If you want to have a collection that's very desirable, buy near-mint or better books; it will cost you a great deal, but you will have books in very collectible condition.

If you're ***not*** planning to resell your collection, however--and many fans don't, since they're collecting for enjoyment rather than investment--you may be perfectly satisfied with good or very good condition copies. Some collectors even focus on fair condition copies, which sometimes sell for as little as 10% the value of a mint-condition book. Collectors have been known to build entire runs of fair-condition books for a fraction of the cost of the more desirable runs. This is fine if you're collecting to read; if you hope to recoup your investment plus a healthy profit later on, though, you really should consider anything less than very good unacceptable.

Don't just assume that any ***new book*** you buy is necessarily a ***mint*** book, either; since some comics are shipped in string-tied bundles, in boxes, it's possible for some copies of books to show "string-wear" (creases or lines caused by the string cutting into the top or bottom copies), box damage (a staple in the box may cause a dent or puncture in the book, or the box may have been dropped on a corner, resulting in minor corner bends), or some rolling of the spine (caused by careless lifting of the bundles by the string, making the books roll inward).

There may also be printing defects in the book; the cover may be miscut, or the color may not line up perfectly. Watch for this sort of defect, also; no matter how much care you take with your collection, if the book wasn't really mint when you bought it, it never will be.

History

HOW IT ALL BEGAN

Comics have been praised by famous author Harlan Ellison as "one of the five uniquely American art forms." If you're interested enough in collecting to have picked up this ***CSN Collectors' Guide,*** you might be interested in how comics began.

We can thank William Randolph Hearst, famous journalist and publisher, for the basic idea of comics; it was Hearst who created the idea of a book reprinting comic strips in the early 1900's. That's what the first comic books were--strip reprints. It was a while before anyone thought about collecting new stories into comic book form.

In 1933, a few special giveaway comics were published; the response for these strip reprints was so tremendous that Max Gaines decided to risk publishing a comic book for sale on the newsstands. He priced his comic book at a dime, the price of many of the popular pulp magazines of that era, and so ***Famous Funnies*** was born in 1934 from Dell Comics, the first actual comics publishing company.

DC--or the company we now know as DC--entered the comics game in 1935, when National Periodical Publications released ***New Fun #1.*** It would be two more years before DC would publish the title that gave it its DC name: ***Detective Comics.***

Walt Disney came to comics in 1935 as well, and the comics boom was underway. Before the end of the decade, many publishers who had been involved with pulp fiction were making the move to the new and fast-growing

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comics industry, and it seemed like there were more titles coming out every month.

In 1938, DC turned the comics industry upside down with the release of the first superhero story in ***Action Comics #1***. This superhero was, of course, Superman, and he changed the direction of comics forever; it's hard to believe that his creators, Jerry Siegel and Joe Schuster, actually had trouble finding a home for their creation!

A year later, Marvel published its first title, ***Marvel Comics #1***, a book that introduced some of Marvel's most famous characters, including the Human Torch and Sub-Mariner. At the time, Marvel published under the name of Timely Comics, but some of the characters--Sub-Mariner, Human Torch, and (later on) Captain America--are very familiar to Marvel readers.

1939 also saw the introduction of Bob Kane's ***Batman***, who was joined a year later by the first teenage sidekick, Robin the Boy Wonder. The line-up of classic heroes was quickly becoming complete.

Captain Marvel debuted from Fawcett in 1940, the same year two pulp heroes, ***Shadow*** and ***Doc Savage***, made the move to comics. These guys obviously knew where the action was...

World War II was great for the comics industry; suddenly, comics had some real villains, and the war led to the creation of more heroes than most readers can imagine. A few other non-superhero concepts came to life during the war as well--most notably Archie, brought to comics in 1942.

After the war, superhero comics gradually declined; by the end of the decade, most publishers were getting out of the superhero publishing field. For many companies, war, westerns, romance, humor, adventure, horror, suspense, and science fiction was the up-and-coming field. Ironically, the Japanese seem to have discovered comics via the American books of the middle 1940's, brought over after the war; they enjoyed the medium so much that it has become far more successful proportionately in Japan than it is here.

In 1950, William M. Gaines, son of comics pioneer Max Gaines, began publishing a series of classic horror, suspense, sf, war, and adventure comics under the EC imprint. Until the furor that arose because of Fredric Wertham's ***Seduction of the Innocent***, EC was the king of the non-superhero comics field.

1953 was a bad year for superheroes; not only had most superhero books been discontinued by that time, but one hero who had continued after the war years, Captain Marvel, was defeated by Superman in a legal battle that never actually concluded--Fawcett, the publisher of ***Captain Marvel***, merely gave up rather than lose a copyright infringement lawsuit. Superman was triumphant, but it was a pretty lonely victory. The superhero field was steadily losing its audience, and even books like ***Captain America*** were converting from superhero to horror/mystery storylines.

In 1954, Wertham's ***Seduction of the Innocent*** brought new and unwanted attention to the comics industry as a major source of America's juvenile delinquency problem. Wertham never adequately proved his charge--but he didn't have to, since the accusation itself led the Senate to investigate the industry and bring about major changes in the comics field.

By the end of 1954, the Comics Code Authority was created, and the predominant publisher of horror/sf comics, EC, saw the writing on the wall. While the company tried to adapt to the coming changes in comics, the attempts were unsuccessful, and within a year, all EC books except ***Mad*** would be out of business.

For the next couple of years, comics seemed to be in the doldrums. Marvel made an unsuccessful attempt or two to revive some of its heroes, but these revivals were unsuccessful and short-lived. In 1956, however, DC tried in experiment in a title devoted to experiments: ***Showcase***. In the fourth issue, they presented an updated version of a classic Golden Age hero, the ***Flash***. After a few more experimental ***Showcase*** issues, DC decided the time was right for a new superhero, and Flash returned to his own book. For most fans, his return heralds the beginning of the Silver Age of comics (even though there were a few new heroes created before the Flash's return, such as J'onn J'onnz, none of them equalled the Scarlet Speedster's impact on the field).

DC dominated the superhero market for a few years, until Martin Goodman at Marvel noticed their success and decided to try returning Marvel to the superhero fold. In 1961, ***Fantastic Four #1*** debuted from the creative team of Stan Lee and Jack Kirby, who were given *carte blanche* to create a new series of superhero comics for the company that would become Marvel; ***Fantastic Four*** followed in short order by ***The Hulk, The Amazing Spider-Man***, and many other Marvel titles. Using a relatively small group of creators (including Lee, Kirby, Steve Ditko, Dick Ayers, Don Heck, and Joe Sinnott, among others), Marvel established a strong company personality that was then lacking at DC, letting fans feel that they knew the comics creators almost as well as they knew the heroes themselves. Even companies like Charlton and Gold Key experimented with super-heroes, introducing such characters as Captain Atom, Magnus, and Solar.

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In 1965, Jim Warren decided that there was still a market for well-done horror stories written and drawn by some of the best in the comics industry, and ***Creepy*** and ***Eerie*** magazines were created, using such talents as Williamson, Wood, Frazetta, Morrow, Torres, Orlando, and others--many of whom had worked for EC years before. The Warren magazines recaptured a lot of the style and appearance of the better EC's, and helped pave the way for the return of horror to comics.

The comics market continued to grow in the 1960's, with companies such as Archie, Tower, ACG, and others turning their attention towards superheroes.

Meanwhile, in 1967, the first underground comic, ***Zap***, was created, giving a comic book voice to the counterculture movement. A new breed of comics creators, offering experimental artwork and untraditional, often adult storylines, created comics for fans who were looking for something more than superheroes and horror. These creators have greatly influenced the comics market today.

Comics' popularity crested again in the late 1960's, and the 1970's were a period of experimentation and slight decline. Comics companies expanded into magazines and digests with some success, but audiences decreased to the point that some creators foresaw the end of the comics industry by the 1980's. Even the bigger publishers began to cancel some of their less successful books and return to horror and science fiction titles to try to find a new audience (can you believe that Marvel even cancelled the ***X-Men*** in the 1970's?!).

What turned the industry around? Most agree it was the direct distribution system, created by Phil Seuling in the 1970's. This system allowed a series of comics specialty shops to develop across the country, catering the the tastes and interest of a dedicated comics audience. The shop where you picked up this ***CSN Collector's Guide*** exists because of Seuling's direct distribution system—and because of the comic shops and the specialized distributors who make this material available to eager audiences across the world.

In 1975, Marvel and DC united efforts to publish the first of several joint books, including a ***Superman-Spider-man*** team-up and, later on, a ***Teen Titans-X-Men*** team-up. These books paved the way for a series of intercompany crossovers that continue to the present day.

In 1978, DC underwent a dramatic cutback often referred to as "the DC Implosion." Suddenly, the variety of comics available underwent a dramatic decline. While things looked bad for the comics industry, a comics newcomer, Eclipse, published its first graphic novel, paving the way for their development as one of the major comic publishers of the early 80's.

In the early 1980's, the independent market began to develop. Several publishers, most notably Dave Sim's Aardvark-Vanaheim and Richard and Wendy Pini's Warp, had published some independent titles in the 1970's, but the 1980's saw the market explode. This came about largely because of the direct-market distribution system; new publishers now had a way to get their books into comic shops all over the country. Previously, new publishers faced a difficult struggle to place their comic books on the newsstands; now, anyone could put together a book and get it to the fans most likely to buy it.

After such an explosion, there was bound to be a decline. Some companies that were born in this time survived to do very well; other companies, like Capital and Pacific, collapsed as the initial enthusiasm for independent comics waned. (Ironically, one of Pacific Comics' fill-in features, a 1930s-ish back up story by Dave Stevens called ***The Rocketeer***, became one of 1991's big-budget films--with creator Stevens involved as an executive producer.)

1982 saw major publishers move into the graphic novel format; meanwhile, Eclipse, which had already established itself as a graphic novel publisher, continued its expansion into periodicals with ***Eclipse Magazine***, which would lead to the Eclipse line of comic books.

In 1983, a new wave of publishers came into the field; meanwhile, publishers like Marvel and DC began to work to develop the high-quality formats they had ventured into the year before. Graphic albums and higher-format series became best-sellers. New companies continued to add new titles, and the growth of the independent market continued through the end of that year and on into 1984 and 1985. Some very small companies rose to fame at this time--companies like Mirage Press, which released the small-printing first issue of ***Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles*** only to discover their comic was a fan favorite that gradually led to a line of toys, animated television shows, films, and more.

During this time period, companies like First, Eclipse, and Dark Horse—companies which had began as small independents--took advantage of a growing market for well-done comics material to become major, established publishers in the new comics specialty market.

The independent market reached its initial peak in 1986, when the black-and-white explosion came into being. Dozens of new black-and-white titles were created by dozens of new companies every month, and it seemed that all of them were successful.

That success was short-lived, however, as the support for the black-and-white market waned later in 1986, causing the collapse of many of the companies who had ridden the wave of success. While a number of the companies you will read about in this ***CSN Collector's Guide*** began before the black and white collapse and managed to survive it, there were dozens of others that simply disappeared.

In 1986, Marvel created its New Universe; DC recreated its old Universe by destroying much of it in ***Crisis on Infinite Earths*** (echoes of which will be heard in the current DC series ***Zero Hour***) and altering a major part of it in the ***Man of Steel*** miniseries that allowed John Byrne to recreate Superman. DC's recreation of its old Universe was relatively successful; Marvel's New Universe was, unfortunately, a flop, and the books faded away a few years later.

One of the small black-and-white publishers of the 1986 boom period, Dark Horse Comics, has grown into a major player in the comics field; Dark Horse has had phenomenal success both with licensed properties (such as ***Terminator, Aliens, James Bond, RoboCop,*** and ***Predator)*** and creator-owned series (such as ***Sin City*** (appearing in ***Dark Horse Presents)*** and ***The American***).

Fans have been blessed with an enormous number of reprint volumes making some of the most expensive comics available in affordable editions. Key Golden Age issues of ***Detective Comics, Superman,*** and ***All-Star*** have been reprinted at a fraction of the cost of the original issues. Various companies have also offered numerous reprints of successful Silver Age (and more recent) comics.

The incredible popularity of ***Batman*** in 1989 and the phenomenal success of Todd McFarlane's ***Spider-Man*** in 1990 were followed in 1991 by two record-setting comics: ***X-Force #1***, with 3.6 million copies sold, and ***X-Men #1***, with sales of slightly more than seven million copies!

1992 was a record-setting year for the independent comics market; a group of creators well-known for their work at Marvel set out to create their own comics line. Image Comics was the result. Major names like Rob Liefeld, Todd McFarlane, Erik Larsen, Jim Lee, Jim Valentino, Marc Silvestri, and Dale Keown left very popular titles from Marvel Comics to create their own heroes for the new company. Liefeld's ***Youngblood #1*** sold over 800,000 copies, setting a record for sales from any modern company other than Marvel or DC; a month later, Todd McFarlane's ***Spawn #1*** shattered that record with sales of over 1.7 million. After a period of incredible growth that was marred by a prevalence of late books, Image retrenched itself somewhat in mid-'93, cutting back to a core number of titles produced by the company's original founding members. Since then, Image's sales have begun to increase once again as the company establishes a reputation of delivering on-time books that fans enjoy. Furthermore, Image has given other creators the inspiration to create their own publishing imprints.

In 1992, Marvel Comics went public, making its stock available to anyone interested in buying shares; as a result, the company expanded its publishing line to make itself as profitable as possible for its stockholders. By the middle of 1993, Marvel was producing almost 150 titles every month; in 1994, that number has fallen to approximately 110. Popular Marvel characters can be found in three, four, or five titles per month, not counting miniseries and one-shots.

In 1992, DC shook up the comic book field by killing Superman (don't worry, though; he's back to his old self now). Then, in '93, the company did it again: Batman fell victim to an incapacitating injury and a new character, Azrael (introduced in a 1992 limited series) became the new Batman (but that, too, has been resolved, and Bruce Wayne is back in the costume... for now). This storyline, which surprised long-time fans and attracted new readers to the character, has made Batman a top seller once again.

Valiant Comics, created in 1991 by Jim Shooter and Bob Layton, escalated in popularity due to the success of their Unity crossover series, one of the most successful mega-crossovers of the 1990s. Valiant has established a loyal audience for its carefully-crafted superhero tales. In the aftermath of this year's **Chaos Effect** storyline, Valiant will reach its planned level of eighteen monthly titles.

Just as the late 1970's and the mid 1980's saw a shrinkage in the comic book marketplace, so did 1993 and early 1994 see the same sort of shrinkage. In this case, however, the bulk of the decrease was credited to the departure of speculators who came in to comics from the sports card market (which, incidentally, those speculators all but devastated as they moved to comics). Speculators had inflated many comic book sales figures by purchasing thousands of copies of books they thought would become hot; when they were unable to turn a fast fortune in comic books, they moved on, leaving many retailers overstocked on books they had ordered to meet a speculative demand that no longer existed. The comic book marketplace has been stabilizing in 1994, finding its own natural level of readership. While sales haven't reached 1993 levels, the number of books being published is greater than ever before, offering modern fans a plethora of choices for reading material.

And now, let's take a look at what's happening in the comics field today. In the upcoming pages, ***CSN*** will give you information on the background and history on some of the major comics companies, as well as some insights into what directions these companies are moving in later on this year. After each entry, we'll give you a list of some of that company's hottest titles, so you can check them out.

How To Collect

HOW DO YOU COLLECT?

Collecting is very simple to get into; all you have to do is save the books you

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buy and try to keep them in the best possible condition. If you're doing that, you're a collector, whether you thought of it that way or not.

A lot of people think collectors are readers who spend hundreds or thousands of dollars acquiring back issues to fill in holes in their collections. That's not necessarily the case. While some collectors try to get all the issues of a particular title, paying hundreds or thousands of dollars for rare books, some collectors maintain a very tight budget and never pay more than $5 or $10 for any book in their collections. Some collectors don't buy back issues at all, preferring instead just to collect new books they can buy at their local comics shop.

DC
Detective COMICS
12¢
BATMAN and ROBIN BECOME
"TARGETS OF THE ALIEN Z-RAY!"
WE'RE TOO LATE, BATMAN! HE'S ALREADY FIRED AT OUR LIFE-FORCE FIGURES--AND NOW WE'RE DOOMED TO DIE IN SECONDS, THE WAY THOSE ALIEN BEASTS DID!
™&©1994 DC Comics

THE BASICS

If you're going to collect, you need to decide what it is you want to collect. That sounds simpler than it is, because you need to be realistic about your budget if you want to enjoy your collection without driving yourself broke in the process.

Most collectors prefer to collect by title; that is, they collect one particular title (like *X-Men* or *Justice League America* or *Cerebus*) and try to get every issue of that title, plus any annuals, special issues, or graphic novels that are published under that title. This way, you're sure you're getting a book you'll enjoy.

Some collectors go further and collect by character; they might not only buy every *Punisher* comic published under that title, they might also make a point of getting every book that *Punisher* appears in. Again, you're reading material about a character you like, so you're probably going to enjoy your collection--and you might get exposed to some other titles you might enjoy in the process, if they happen to have crossovers with the character you collect.

Some people collect by *artist* or *writer*; that is, they might buy every book that Mark Bagley draws, or every book that James Robinson writes. This is particularly intriguing for the collector who enjoys the art of comics as much or more than the characters themselves; it allows a collector to see how a creator has developed over the years, and exposes the collector to a variety of characters and concepts that the creator has done.

A few collectors try to collect all the books of a particular company; unless you choose a very small company, though, this can get very expensive very quickly. Also, remember that "company identity" means a lot less than it did a decade or two ago; the same creators whose work you enjoy at Marvel may also be working for Image, Valiant, or DC at the same time, and you might miss out on some material you'd really like just because it didn't have the right corporate name on the cover.

A few collectors make a point of collecting every first issue published. Again, this can get *very* expensive. Furthermore, while the idea is a noble one--it will expose you to every book being published, and you will know what everyone is doing--it can also fill your collection with a lot of books you don't enjoy while burdening your budget. If you can afford it, buying all first issues is fine; if you're having to live within your means like most of us, though, you might ask the friendly folks at your comics shop to help you decide what first issues are likely to appeal to you and what first issues aren't. They keep up with what's being published, and if you can tell them what you like, they can help you find new books that are likely to match your interests.

Some collectors specialize in a time period, collecting all books from a particular decade. Some collectors specialize in certain genres of books, collecting all horror books or all westerns or all 3-D books.

What do you want to do? If you enjoy reading about your favorite characters, you'll probably want to collect by titles or characters. If you want to follow an artist or writer, collect that way. But remember one thing--a collection has to be something you enjoy. If you're buying a lot of material you don't like, the odds are much higher that the people you hope to sell your collection to later on won't like it, either.

COLLECTING FOR INVESTMENT

Comics certainly make great investments-- there's no denying that. We've all heard stories of the collector who sold his first issue of *Captain Zippybash* for $5000, or the collector who traded his collection for a place on the beach in Malibu. Remember, though, that deals like that make the news because they're *rare*. If every collector sold his collection for megabucks, you wouldn't hear about it because it wouldn't be news.

This is a *Comic Shop News Collectors' Guide*, not an *Investors' Guide*; we're not going to tell you that you should buy multiple copies of books, that you should invest heavily in appreciating back issues, or that you should buy things you don't like because they're likely to be expensive later on. Comics are a difficult field for speculation; prices rise and fall quickly, and the prevalence of comic shops makes it tougher for a speculator to find a buyer for the books in which he's invested--after all, they can find the same books at almost any comic shop!

We spend a lot of time telling you what's hot in this *Guide*; there's a reason for that. If a book is hot, that means that a lot of people collecting comics are enjoying it enough to buy it. If all those thousands upon thousands of collectors are enjoying a title (thereby making it hot), the odds are greater that you'll enjoy it as well. These are not books that we think are necessarily great investments for maximum dollar return in minimum time--but they are books you're likely to enjoy reading, and they're books that are likely to have an avid following.

Remember the basic rule of investing: you're trying to buy at a cheap price something that someone else will want badly enough to pay a high price for later on. That someone else is probably *not* going to be your local comics shop; the shop is in the comics business, and if a book is truly likely to be valuable a few months down the line, the comics shop will probably be more aware of it than you are, and they're probably *already* backstocking copies of it.

If you *have* to invest, then you might ask your local shop owner what books he or she is backstocking heavily. These are books the shop is willing to risk its own money on, so you can use that as a guide. Remember, though, that if your local comic shop is backstocking a large quantity of these comics, the odds are that you won't be able to sell your comics to that shop later on.

WHAT DO I DO NOW?

You've decided that you're going to collect, and you know what you're going to collect. Now, let's talk about how to collect it.

Simple. You buy what you need to fill in your collection.

That's all we'd have to tell you if everyone was independently wealthy. If you're still reading this, we assume you aren't wealthy, so we'll give you a few tips on how to fill out your collection.

RULE #1: Never pass up cover-price new comics to buy back issues. Never ever.

Remember, once that book you passed up at cover price sells out, you'll be paying back-issue prices for it. Many books jump in price by 50%-100% as soon as they're no longer available as new books--then they don't increase in value again for a long, long time. If you pass on a cover-price *Star Wars* to buy last month's issue for $4, there's a chance that the next time you go into your local comics shop, they'll be sold out of the cover-price new issue of *Star Wars* (after all, we all know how hot that book is) and will only have it at $4--while the last month's issue is probably still selling for $4.

Of course, there can be exceptions here--if you find a back issue at such a bargain price that you know it won't be there next week, or if it's a book you've been wanting forever, then go ahead. But a wise collector tries to budget enough for new comics and for back issues.

RULE TWO: Make a back issue plan and stick with it.

Don't buy back issues at random unless a title is new enough that there aren't that many back issues to buy. Many collectors try to work in 20-issue lumps, trying to fill in 20 issues back from their oldest issue. If you have all the issues of *Cerebus* from 80 on up and you were using this system, you'd try to buy any reasonably-priced *Cerebus* issues you find between 60 and 80. If you collect this way, you're more likely to understand what's happening in the comics you've bought, and you're also more likely to find the books you want. Each 20-issue-increment will get harder to find than the 20-issue-increment before it, but it'll be gradual. Also, you tend to fill in holes in your collection with less expensive books first, then you buy the more expensive ones later on, when you might have more money. (For most folks, income increases with age...)

Some collectors prefer to do just the opposite; they try to buy the early issues first, then work their way up. Even then, they find it best to work in 20-issue increments; that way, they get entire stories that they can actually read and enjoy.

RULE THREE: If a bargain hits you in the head, forget rule one and two.

Let's be honest here; any plan has to be flexible. If you find a first printing of *Bone #1* for a buck or two and you pass it up because you're only collecting the last five issues of *Bone* right now, you need to rethink your collecting policy. A bargain isn't likely to be there forever, so grab it while you can.

RULE FOUR: Evaluate your collection periodically.

Last month, it would have cost you over $3000 to buy one copy of every comic, graphic novel, and trade paperback published. Most people can't afford that. That's why you limit your collection in some way.

There are a lot of good books competing for your collecting dollar. If you keep buying books you no longer enjoy, you may be missing some great stuff being published out there. Remember, with $3000 worth of stuff a month being published, there's probably some great comics that you'd love--if you just had the money to try them.

Periodically, look over what you're collecting. If you're not enjoying those titles as much as you used to, start looking at the comics racks and see if there's something else there that you might enjoy more. A collection isn't a lifetime commitment--if you're getting tired of a book, drop it for a while and try something else. There are hundreds of books out there that you'll probably like, if you just give them a chance.

RULE FIVE: If you aren't taking care of your collection, you don't have a collection--just an accumulation.

The best way to keep your collection valuable is to take care of it. There are a few comics-collecting basic supplies here that will enable you to do just that.

First off, *bag your collection.* You don't have to have a single bag for every book; you can put two in a bag, back-to-back, and still see the covers to each. If you're on a real budget, then you can put runs of five or ten books in one bag--but you might want to put a label on your bag to tell you just what's there.

Why should you bag your collection? It won't stop your books from aging--but it will help to keep insects and the elements out. A number of household insect pests have an avid appetite for the exact same paper you find in comic books--but they don't seem to enjoy plastic nearly as much. The most common form of damage to comics collections is water damage--and again, the bags can help keep the water and your favorite comics from meeting one another.

Comic bags *aren't* airtight, however, so don't think that bagging your collection will permanently halt the aging process--it won't work.

Oddly enough, the most expensive mylar bags are, in some ways, the least protective. Most mylar bags don't seal at the top, thereby eliminating most of the pest-protection aspects of the bag. Even worse, some collectors actually damage their books on the stiff mylar bag itself.

Certainly, mylar is a more stable material than the plastic used in standard comics bags--but it's expensive and, as we've said, it can actually contribute to damage of your comics. If you want to use mylar material, mylites (thinner, flexible bags made of lighter-weight mylar) might be a good compromise--and they do allow you to tape-seal your bags.

Recently, Ultra-Pro bags and Pro-Gard bags, which offer much the protective quality of Mylar for a lower price, have been made available; these are good investments for valuable books. For the truly expensive collector's item, a deluxe Showcase Sealer, which virtually sandwiches the book in lucite, has become very popular.

Once you've bagged your collection, get rid of the old grocery store boxes you've been storing your books in and buy some comic book boxes from your local comics shop. Comic book boxes help you protect your collection; first, they're designed to be just wide enough for your comics, thereby reducing the damage caused by books sliding across each other in a too-wide box. Second, if you fill your box adequately, the box and the books in the box work together to support your comics, keeping them flat and cutting down on the air-flow around the books. A new line of plastic comic boxes offers superlative protection at an affordable price; they should last ten times longer than a standard cardboard box, making them worth the extra cost.

Don't underfill a comics box; it's better to have it a little bit snug than it is to have the books so loose that the books can slump down and bend inwards due to the slack in the box. Many comic shops stock slack adjusters, which are cardboard inserts that help keep the books standing upright in partially filled boxes.

If you don't buy a large number of comics each week, you might want to keep your collection in short (or half-sized) comics boxes; this way, it's easier for your to fill a box. If you buy large numbers of books, you may want to buy full-sized boxes--but measure the space you're going to store your collection in to make sure it's deep enough to take the full-length boxes.

KNOWING WHAT YOU HAVE

If you don't have an indexing system, you may want to develop one. It'll make it easy for you to know what you have--and it'll help you avoid buying the same books more than once.

Many comics shops sell index cards or index sheets for comics, but you can make your own index sheet easily enough. All you need is a typewriter and access to a photocopying machine.

Collectors' index cards are very handy because they're smaller, but many collectors prefer to use full-sized index pages and make out a wantlist of books they're looking for. Krause Publications offers a superlative *Marvel Comics Checklist and Index*, and they're planning to add a comprehensive *Silver Age Checklist and Index* in the near future.

Now you have the basics; if you're a comics collector, you're ready to move on to the part everyone wants to read about--the comics themselves!

Marvel

Marvel Comics is the most successful comic book company today, publishing around 30% of the comics sold in the collector's field--but that wasn't always the case. Not only is Marvel not the *first* comics company, it has gone through periods in its history when its impact in the comics field was very minor--hard to believe when you consider the incredible impact Marvel has on comics today.

Marvel's roots in comics can be traced all the way back to 1939, when Marvel began its first title, *Marvel Comics*. In that initial title were the debut appearances of two of Marvel's best-known characters--the Human Torch (created by Carl Burgos) and the Sub-Mariner (created by Bill Everett). This book appeared at the very beginning of the superhero era that made up the Golden Age of Comics, and the two were soon joined by many other heroes, including The Angel, the Patriot, the Vision, The Raven, and others. It was a creation by Joe Simon and Jack Kirby that became the third major hero of the Timely era (Timely being the name Marvel published under in the beginning): *Captain America.*

Captain America, a patriotic hero to end all patriotic heroes, quickly became one of the Big Three of Timely Comics. While Marvel/Timely published dozens of other titles, it is the *Human Torch*, the *Sub-Mariner*, and *Captain America* that we remember so fondly from that Golden Age era--and these are the characters who helped re-launch Marvel Comics in the early 1960's.

In the Human Torch and Sub-Mariner, Marvel/Timely had heroes representing two of the most elemental powers: the power of fire and the power of water. It was natural that the two of them should not only meet but should be enemies, as was the case in *Marvel Mystery #8.*

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In *Captain America*, Marvel had not only an amazingly successful comic book, but a comic that would have an indelible effect on the way comics were drawn and comics stories were told. With Simon and Kirby at the helm, the incredible action of *Captain America* became a comics standard, and the scope and intensity of the visual action in the book became legendary. Later in the '40's, Captain America even ventured beyond the comic book page into the realm of movie serials, with only moderate success.

Marvel/Timely even experimented with super-teams, offering not only the *All-Winners Squad*, featuring several of its most famous heroes, but also the *Young Allies*, uniting several of its younger heroes and sidekicks.

As the war ended, the superhero boom began to decline, and Marvel was particularly hard hit. As the '40's gave way to the '50's, comics readers saw more and more of Marvel's line switching over to genre fiction: horror, western, and war titles dominated the Marvel line, and even the major heroes were not invulnerable as they saw their books cancelled, or in some cases, changed; *Captain America* eventually became *Captain America's Weird Tales* before being discontinued entirely.

For Marvel in the 1950's, horror/sf/fantasy was the byword. The company published dozens of titles in these genres--some of the titles later became the home of Marvel's superheroes, with books like *Tales of Suspense, Journey into Mystery, Tales to Astonish, Strange Tales,* and *Amazing Adult Fantasy* becoming a part of Marvel's lineup.

Even in the '50's, though, Marvel experimented with superheroes to a degree. *Sub-Mariner, the Human Torch,* and *Captain America* all returned briefly in the mid-50's, and there were costumed genre heroes like *The Two-Gun Kid,* a western costumed hero, and Joe Maneely's *Black Knight,* a heroic fantasy. Most of these super-hero experiments met with little success, though; it just seemed that, for the most part, the comics-reading public in the middle 1950's was tired of predictable super-hero adventures. Marvel eventually quit trying and fell into a niche they could fill very well: monster stories, science fiction, and bizarre fantasy pieces.

By the end of the 1950's, Marvel had a stable of some of the best talent in the field, with such luminaries as Jack Kirby, Steve Ditko, Gene Colan, Dick Ayers, Don Heck, and Joe Sinnott all working with editor/head writer Stan Lee to fill the pages of the numerous Marvel titles devoted to the horror/sf/fantasy genre.

Stan Lee and Jack Kirby still had very fond memories of superheroes, however, and when publisher Martin Goodman suggested in 1961 that the company might try a super-team again following the success of DC's *Justice League,* Marvel debuted its new superhero line with its first book, *The Fantastic Four.* The Human Torch was back--but it wasn't the same Human Torch. His three teammates also had super-powers--but unlike the DC heroes, who seemed to view their team as a lodge meeting with all their buddies, the Marvel heroes were human. They bickered; they didn't see eye to eye; at times, they even quit the team and went off on their own.

This was the beginning of the Marvel Age of Comics, although no one seemed to know it then. Marvel had developed superheroes with problems and personalities, and comics fans found the change refreshing. Soon after the team was created, the Human Torch ran across Sub-Mariner, a victim of amnesia, living a destitute life in the Bowery. A second Timely legend returned to Marvel Comics--as a very angry villain.

Meanwhile, Stan Lee and Steve Ditko had created a new teenage hero for the last issue of *Amazing Fantasy*--a teen who had been bitten by a radioactive spider, giving him the proportionate powers of a spider. Like many of the readers of Spider-Man, Peter Parker had personal problems, social problems, and school problems--and he had an immense following very soon after his creation and the debut of his own title.

While Lee, Kirby, Ditko, and others were busy creating the basic titles of the growing Marvel Universe in the mid-60's, unleashing Iron Man, Ant-Man, Thor, the Avengers, Dr. Strange, The X-Men, and the Hulk, the third element of Marvel's Golden Age Trio appeared in the pages of *Strange Tales #114.* The Human Torch did battle with Captain America in that issue--and while it turned out not to be the real Captain America, it still led to the return of Steve Rogers in *Avengers #4* a few months later.

By the end of the 1960's, Marvel was on its way to prominence in the comics field--and a large number of new creations had been unveiled, including SHIELD, the Silver Surfer, Daredevil, Galactus, and more.

As Marvel moved into the 1970's, the company grew even more, and Stan Lee was no longer able to write virtually every Marvel title. Roy Thomas came in to assist Stan at the end of the 60's, and by the time the next decade had moved in, Marvel was using a number of talented writers and artists who had not been a part of that initial Marvel renaissance.

While the number of books that Marvel published continue to grow in the 1970's as the company ventured into horror/fantasy *(Werewolf by Night, Frankenstein, Tomb of Dracula)*, martial arts *(Deadly Hands of Kung-Fu, Iron Fist, Master of Kung-Fu)*, and heroic fantasy (*Red Sonja, Kull, Conan*) in addition to super-heroes, the company seemed to have trouble finding a direction.

Marvel's popularity continued to grow in the super-hero field, however, with the return of the *X-Men* in their own non-reprint title. It's hard to believe that, for a while in the early '70's, there was no new mutants title at all--the *X-Men* book had actually become a reprint series because of low readership! Of course, the X-Men soon became Marvel's most popular characters; this year, they expanded into their second ongoing monthly book, and in the past fifteen years, they have given rise to a variety of spin-off titles, including *Cable, X-Force, X-Factor, Excalibur,* and *Wolverine.*

In 1982, Marvel produced its first graphic novel, *The Death of Captain Marvel.* More graphic novels followed, some of them featuring creator-owned characters. Shortly afterwards, the Epic line was launched, and for the first time, Marvel was publishing (under the Epic imprint) comics that were creator-owned concepts. This added to Marvel's expanding output of comics, graphic novels, and limited series.

In 1986, Marvel unveiled its New Universe--a world totally separate from the Marvel Universe. The New Universe never managed to catch on with fans, though, teaching Marvel a valuable lesson: fans are very happy with the Marvel Universe and don't see any reason to abandon it. That's why Marvel's next "new universe" type project wasn't really a new universe at all: ind, it focused on the Marvel Universe of 2099, a continuation of the current Marvel Universe.

Marvel's current publishing strategy emphasizes well-known characters, using them as the foundation for spinoff titles and miniseries. Marvel has also developed a successful line of licensed books, utilizing such popular characters as *Beavis & Butt-Head* and *Ren & Stimpy*. Later this year, they're unveiling a line of Disney comics—and next year, they'll add a full line of Harvey comics.

Current Editor-in-Chief Tom DeFalco has two main goals, he says: "To keep Marvel Comics the most popular, successful comics company there is, and to maintain a sense of hoo-ha fun in Marvel's comics. With Marvel's editors, though, I don't have to do much more than just applaud the creators of the books--Marvel's people know what the readers want. The editors are the ones who do the actual work; they hire the creative people, they shepherd the book from a basic idea into a beautiful finished product. I talk to them in terms of general storylines, in terms of where a character is going, in terms of the members of the team. I deal with vague generalities, and they deal with very specific situations. They make all my generalities work. I oversee the line, and that's pretty much it."

"Marvel is constantly looking to expand the marketplace. We know that there are millions of people out there who would love comics if they tried them, so we want to make it easy to try them," DeFalco explained. Marvel's expansion into licensed properties, music comics, and animation-inspired books are all designed to entice new readers to come to comics from other media.

When asked why Marvel remains such an incredibly popular publisher, Tom DeFalco said it was a very difficult question to answer without seeming conceited. "I guess we must be doing what people want to read," he conjectured.

Hot Picks

The X-Books: Marvel's mutants remain perennially popular; the X-Men consistently top the list of best-selling comics. The September premiere of a new mutant title, *Generation X*, is sure to be Marvel's biggest seller of '94.

The Spider-Man Books: Big things are happening in the Spidey books; there's a second Spider-Man, a clone of the original, and he's bringing plenty of plot twists along with him. This current storyline has generated a great deal of interest in the Spider-Man books—and this fall's animated series is going to generate even more interest!

Punisher-Batman: Later this summer, Marvel will release their crossover book starring their ever-popular vigilante and the legendary Dark Knight. Illustrated by John Romita Jr., this book should be one of the biggest titles of the summer.

Fantastic Four: Big changes are in the works in Marvel's flagship title; the team has fallen apart, and it's up to the Thing to be the standard-bearer until he can reunite the quartet. Meanwhile, the son of Reed and Sue Richards starts his own super-team, *Fantastic Force*, this September.

DC

DC is the oldest comic book company still in business in America; from the company's beginnings in 1935 until the present day, DC has published more comics than anyone else

DC's first title was *New Fun #1*, published by Major Malcolm Wheeler-Nicholson in 1935. This was the first comic book to contain all-new material and not just another bunch of comic strip reprints. Two years later, the company began *Detective Comics*, from which it took its DC name.

It was the publication of *Action Comics #1* in 1938 that made DC's fame and fortune, however; this was the first appearance of Superman, and it revolutionized the comic book industry. Thanks to Jerry Siegel's and Joe Shuster's Kryptonian creation, superheroes became a part of comic books--and the industry has never been the same.

In 1939, Batman appeared in the pages of *Detective Comics #27*; in another year, DC would introduce the first super-hero team, the first appearance of Wonder Woman, the creation of the teenage sidekick in the pages of *Detective* with the introduction of Robin, and many more comic book standards.

As the 1940's came to a close, DC saw a decline in superhero popularity (as did every publisher in the industry). DC moved into radio-show tie-ins and adventure titles.

By the 1950's, the superhero had fallen off in popularity enough that DC put a major emphasis on romance comics, science fiction titles, westerns, and humor books (some humor titles featured such notable television and film stars as Bob Hope, Jackie Gleason, and Dean Martin and Jerry Lewis).

Those of you who are avid super-hero fans today have DC to thank for the return to fame and glory of the superhero. It was DC who decided to introduce a new hero, the Martian Manhunter, as a backup feature in *Detective Comics #225*. Shortly after that, DC followed it up with the return of the Flash in the pages of *Showcase #4*--although this was an all-new Flash, a man who was an avid fan of the Golden Age *Flash Comics* before he became the World's Fastest Man in his own world.

The superhero field began to blossom again behind DC's lead, and by the early 1960's, DC had brought back updated versions of some of its most popular creations, including Green Lantern, Hawkman, and the Atom. Even its science fiction and mystery titles had shifted towards super-heroes with the addition of Adam Strange in *Mystery in Space*, the Doom Patrol in *My Greatest Adventure*, and Dial H for Hero in *House of Mystery*.

While this resurgence in interest in superhero comics was going so strong that it earned the nickname of The Silver Age, one of DC's creations ventured in new directions. With comics superheroes become more and more popular, ABC decided the time was right for the superhero to hit the airwaves, and the

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Batman television show began not one, but *two* nights a week in 1966. The show, produced in a "camp" style that utilized silly humor, deadpan straight lines, and cliched cliffhangers, became incredibly popular--so popular that "camp" became a part of DC's comics--and "go-go checks," a black-and-white check pattern, became a part of DC's cover motif.

In the late 1960's, DC pushed both into its past and into its comics future by bringing back such characters as The Spectre and a revised Green Arrow, and by making use of such now-greats as Berni Wrightson, Jeff Jones, Howard Chaykin, and others on books. As the 60's gave way to the 70's, DC continued to produce new comics hero ideas--not since the 1940's had so many different superheroes debuted in such a brief time period.

In the late 1960's and early 1970's, the difference between DC and Marvel began to lessen as two of Marvel's best-known artist-creators, Steve Ditko and Jack Kirby, left Marvel and came to work for DC, bringing new and innovative ideas with them. ***The Creeper, the Hawk and the Dove, the New Gods, Mr. Miracle,*** and many other ideas were the result of the move by these two giants of the comics field. Ironically, some twenty years later, many of those same heroes have returned to the forefront of DC's current comics line, with others (such as ***Omac***) soon to follow.

Meanwhile, new greats were beginning to work for DC, most notably Denny O'Neil and Neal Adams, who changed ***Green Lantern*** from just another superhero strip to one of the first "socially relevant comics" ever done.

In the 1970's, DC was active in the return of horror comics, gothic romances, sword-and-sorcery, and other genres--but unlike the late 1940's and early 1950's, DC's superhero emphasis never faded.

In the past decade, DC has been involved in creating or updating dozens of its heroes. As the comics market "grew up," becoming more mature and more financially able to support better-quality formats and more sophisticated ideas.

With the publication of Frank Miller and Klaus Janson's ***Dark Knight***, the first prestige-format book, DC reestablished the Batman's image as a creature of the night. This revitalization of Batman would prove to be the precursor of major changes to come. Suddenly comics were growing up, and people were looking at comics--and DC in particular--in a new light.

Not content with being the second-most-popular comic book company, DC decided that it was time to make a major push to regain its status as the #1 company in the comics field. Part of that push began when, in 1986, DC re-vitalized Superman in a six-issue miniseries written and illustrated by John Byrne--and then started ***Superman*** all over again with #1.

The other part of DC's push was more far-reaching. ***Crisis on Infinite Earths***, a redefining twelve-issue series by Marv Wolfman and George Perez, was one of DC's boldest moves; the company "rewrote" fifty years of continuity by presenting a mini-series that combined all its comics worlds into a single continuity, altering, creating, and killing DC heroes in the process. From that point on, DC was an all-new company, and none of the old rules applied. DC's current ***Zero Hour*** series continues that trend of redefining long-running continuity to make DC more accessible to younger readers.

As DC reinterpreted several more of its old concepts, including ***Flash, Green Lantern,*** and ***Justice League,*** and ***Legion of Super-Heroes,*** people became aware more and more that DC was a company determined to push for #1. With the introduction of more expensive trade paperbacks, hardcover graphic novels, deluxe hardcover limited editions, and other collector's items, DC's growth in popularity has been phenomenal.

DC also staked its claim on the realm of mature horror with sophisticated, thought-provoking dark fantasy titles like ***Swamp Thing, Sandman,*** and ***Shade the Changing Man.*** DC's unique approach to horror, strong on mood rather than monsters and gore, found an avid, loyal audience. In early 1993, these mature-reader, sophisticated fantasy comics earned their own DC subsidiary imprint, Vertigo; since then, DC has expanded the line with several new miniseries and one-shots, building a very loyal audience for these very different comics.

In late '92, DC attracted enormous media attention when they killed Superman, drawing millions of readers to the books and creating a tremendous audience eager to see what would happen next. The original Superman soared back into action in the summer of '93, just in time for the debut of ABC's Superman television series ***Lois and Clark: The New Adventures of Superman.***

Knightfall/Knightquest/KnightsEnd, a long-running Batman storyline that reached its climax this fall, presented a new, more vengeful Batman carrying on for an injured Bruce Wayne. This led to a dramatic confrontation that paved the way for Bruce Wayne's return as Gotham's Dark Knight Detective.

DC is also the distributor of Milestone Comics, a major line of minority-focused comic books produced by already-established top talent such as Dwayne McDuffie, Denys Cowan, and Mark Bright. A Milestone-Superman crossover series, ***Worlds In Collision,*** brought newfound attention to the Milestone titles.

This summer, DC is shaking up their universe again with ***Zero Hour: Crisis In Time.*** This miniseries will revamp the DC Universe, rebuilding continuity. In the aftermath of Zero Hour, DC is celebrating ***Zero Month*** in August, when every DC Universe title will offer a special zero issue that makes it easy for new readers to sample these books. This is the most ambitious comic book event of '94, and it's sure to be a hit with readers.

Hot Picks

Batman: Bruce Wayne is back—for now—and fans can't wait to see what's in store next for the Dark Knight (and there are rumors that Bruce Wayne will again give up the cape and cowl). Related titles include ***Robin, Catwoman,*** and the upcoming ***Azrael.***

The Superman Books: The four ***Superman*** titles comprise a massive, complex Superman storyline; in upcoming storylines, Superman must deal with the discovery of what appears to be his dead body beneath the city of Metropolis... but if it is, then who is he?...

Zero Hour and ***Zero Month: Zero Hour*** is the most ambitious series DC has launched in years; this all-encompassing series will redefine the DC Universe and provide a handy jumping-on point for new readers. In August, DC will launch special "zero issues" of all its DC Universe titles, redefining the characters and teams in post-***Zero-Hour*** terms.

Sandman: DC's most popular Vertigo title, it's one of the most intriguing and thought-provoking fantasy titles produced in the comics field today. All of the issues leading up to the current storyline are available in affordable trade paperback and/or hardcover editions.

Dark Horse

Dark Horse, now eight years old, was started by publisher Mike Richardson in summer of 1986, at the height of the boom in black and white comics from small publishers that started with the phenomenal success of Mirage Studio's ***Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles.*** Says editor Randy Stradley, "I had known Paul Chadwick through the pages of ***APA 5*** for a number of years and knew he had an idea for a strip, ***Concrete*** that he was trying to sell. I talked to him about Dark Horse publishing ***Concrete.*** He agreed to do eight page stories for our anthology comic, ***Dark Horse Presents.*** The book was very well received and sold far better than we expected. We thought it would sell 5000 to 10,000 and it sold over 50,000. Our timing was very fortuitous, if we had come in even a few months later we might not have survived the first year"

"The reason we've been able to attract top talent," says Stradley, "is that first we are willing to really share the profits with the creators, not just give them a small percentage as a royalty. So they make good money. Second, we allow our creators freedom on the projects that they own."

Dark Horse's greatest successes came in licensed products. ***Aliens, Predator, James Bond, RoboCop, and Indiana Jones*** have all been successful, but the most popular licensed product is undoubtedly Dark Horse's continuation of the ***Star Wars*** story in a series of miniseries. Dark Horse has added the licenses for ***The Shadow, Doc Savage,*** and ***Tarzan*** to its impressive comics stable.

In 1991, Dark Horse and DC joined forces to present ***Batman Vs. the Predator;*** this storyline was so popular that a second crossover is in the works.

Dark Horse is also the distributor of Legend Comics, an imprint that features cutting-edge comics from Arthur Adams, Michael Allred, John Byrne, Paul Chadwick, Geof Darrow, Dave Gibbons, Mike Mignola, and Frank Miller.

In eight years, Dark Horse has grown from a small publisher with a handful of black and white comics to one of the largest publishers in the comics market. Some of the company's comic book series have made the jump to movies (***The Mask*** and ***Time Cop***), enhancing the company's visibility.

Hot Picks

Star Wars: The Freedon Nadd Uprising: Dark Horse's latest ***Star Wars*** series is an exciting tale of Jedi adventure and intrigue.

Aliens Vs. Predator: The Deadliest of the Species: Former X-Men scribe Chris Claremont has created one of the most compelling licensed properties that Dark Horse has ever produced. If only the studios could make films this good!

Comics' Greatest World: Will To Power: This is a series of sixteen one-shot superhero comic books that ties in with Dark Horse's line of superhero books. At $1 per book, it's hard to find anything more affordable that's this entertaining.

Malibu

(Bravura/Malibu/ Rock-It/Ultraverse)

Malibu Entertainment began as the now-defunct Malibu Comics. Their output has included pulp adventure, manga and anime inspired series, superhero adventure, horror, and science fiction; in the past year, they have settled into a mixture of creator-owned projects (Bravura), licensed action/adventure/sf books (Malibu), music-inspired comics (Rock-It), and a carefully-crafted superhero universe (Ultraverse).

Malibu's Ultraverse line has garnered the company a great deal of attention. This exciting new superhero universe, featuring the work of such top talents as Mike W. Barr, Gerard Jones, Steve Englehart, Steve Gerber, James Hudnall, Rick Hoberg, Norm Breyfogle, James Robinson, and Barry Windsor-Smith, is one of the first comic book debuts to be promoted via national television advertising; the result is the most successful superhero-universe debut of 1993.

According to Mason, Malibu's publishing philosophy is simple. "I try to publish the kinds of comics I like to read--and even more importantly, I try to publish the kinds of comics that Dave, my boss, likes to read. That's my secret of success in this business."

Hot Picks

Mortal Kombat: One of the most popular videogames becomes a very popular comic.

Star Trek: Deep Space Nine: Malibu's adaptation of the popular television series is featured in a monthly series and a miniseries; look for a crossover with DC's ***Star Trek: The Next Generation*** this fall.

UltraForce: Ultraverse's first all-star superteam title boasts a fan-favorite lineup of heroes and the top-notch creative team of Gerard Jones and George Perez.

Image

In late 1991, Rob Liefeld and Todd McFarlane, two of Marvel's most popular writer-artists, announced their intention to publish their next creations not under the Marvel imprint, but under their own Image logo. Within a few months, four other creators—Erik Larsen, Jim Lee, Marc Silvestri, and Jim Valentino—became a part of the Image creative team, forming the six-man framework around which the company is based.

Image's mainstay is superhero adventure; the creators had all proven themselves with this sort of material at Marvel, so it's only natural that they've chosen to do what they do best for their own company. Image became the comics phenomenon of 1992: they set all sorts of sales records, generated more excitement than any company had done in many years, and seized control of a major percentage of the comic book marketplace—far more than any new publisher has done in many years. The only problem Image seemed to face was in getting out enough books to satisfy the demand: the company's first year was marked by a great many late titles, but by the end of their second year, the company had solved their initial production problems and was giving readers the comics excitement they craved on a regular basis.

Image expanded in 1993, adding new books by a variety of creators; later that year, though, the company returned to its original creative vision, primarily publishing books produced by the original creators or their studios. As a result, Image has firmly established itself as one of the industry's most successful companies—and with some of its titles debuting as animated series within the next year, they're venturing into new media as well.

The key to Image's success is simply giving the readers what they want: the company is very fan-oriented, offering dynamic, visual superhero adventure in the same style that made these creators fan-favorites at Marvel.

Hot Picks

Spawn: Todd McFarlane's mystical superhero remains Image's most popular character. Two recent crossovers with Batman only enhanced the hero's popularity; the spinoff ***Violator*** series is also quite popular, and that popularity should continue into the ***Angela*** miniseries later this fall.

WildCATs: Jim Lee seems to have perfected the super-team, bringing his skills from ***X-Men*** to this new creation. The current storyline reunites Lee with Chris Claremont, his writing partner on the ***X-Men.*** Lee will be taking a sabbatical af-

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ter this story is complete, but is personally selecting the writers and artists who will continue the book in his absence.

ShadowHawk: Jim Valentino has kept this urban vigilante in the forefront with hard-hitting action storylines, innovative cover enhancements, and on-time delivery. The fourth ShadowHawk miniseries will feature guest appearances by some of Image's most popular heroes.

Savage Dragon: Erik Larsen's emerald hero continues to star in high-impact adventures; Larsen has also overseen several miniseries and spinoffs, such as ***KillCat SuperPatriot***.

Cyberforce: Marc Silvestri's core superteam stars in one of the company's most popular books.

Youngblood: The premiere Image title, produced by Rob Liefeld,has returned after an eighteen-month hiatus; judging from fan response, everyone's glad to have the team back in action!

Kitchen Sink

Kitchen Sink Press is one of the oldest of the independent publishers. According to publisher and founder Denis Kitchen, "We go way back to 1969. This is our twenty-fifth year, which makes us one of the real pioneers in the business."

Kitchen Sink started out as a publisher of what were known as "underground comix." These were generally adults-only titles that dealt with and were aimed at the counter-culture audience during the late sixties and seventies. Early on, however, Kitchen Sink diversified and started producing more mainstream comics as well. "We are also publishing what are, I think, some of the best contemporary comics. ***Xenozoic Tales*** is one of them. That's by Mark Schultz, who has a terrific style." Schultz's comic book series has been reprinted in three trade paperbacks; it also served as the basis for the animated series ***Cadillacs & Dinosaurs***.

In 1993, Kitchen Sink took over Kevin Eastman's Tundra Publishing, merging that company's titles with Kitchen's own under the Kitchen Sink imprint, home of such popular series as ***The Crow*** and the original ***Madman***.

The secret to Kitchen Sink's success? "I think that we don't underestimate our audience," Kitchen said. "We are very seriously interested in comics and comics history. Kitchen Sink Press is basically here for the long run. Our goal is to preserve the best comics from the past and to present some of the best talent of today."

Hot Picks

Xenozoic Tales: This title comes out all too rarely—but it's worth waiting for. Mark Schultz's superlative artwork and compelling storylines make this a must-read. Look for it to really sizzle after the animated ***Cadillacs & Dinosaurs*** series debuts.

The Collected Crow: The success of the Brandon Lee film version of ***The Crow*** makes this one of the most requested anthologies of 1994.

Fantagraphics

Fantagraphics founder and publisher Gary Groth has been involved in publishing since 1968 when he began publishing what were then called fanzines (fan magazines). He took over publication of the ***Nostalgia Journal***, a tabloid newspaper, in late 1976. The title was changed to the ***Comics Journal*** a few issues later, and it was switched over to a magazine with #37 in 1977. The magazine remained Fantagraphics' sole publication until the early 19980s.

"The first comic we published was ***Love and Rockets*** in 1981," Fantagraphics editor Kim Thompson said. "The Hernandez brothers had self-published what ended up being the first half of our first issue. They had sent a copy to us for possible review in the ***Journal***, and we liked it so much we offered to publish. We took the first issue and what they had prepared for the second and published a big first issue. The Hernandez Brothers had sent their stuff everywhere and nobody was interested. The critical response to their work has been tremendous."

Fantagraphics followed up ***Love and Rockets*** with several other offbeat comic magazines including ***Neat Stuff, Hate, Eightball***, and others.

Fantagraphics continues to publish one of the oldest continuing comics publication, ***The Comics Journal***, "***Comics Journal*** views comic books as a more durable, mature Art. It takes a more critical approach to the medium."

Hot Picks

Love and Rockets: the Hernandez Bros.' real-life drama remains the company's most popular publication. Several trade paperback collections of early issues are available.

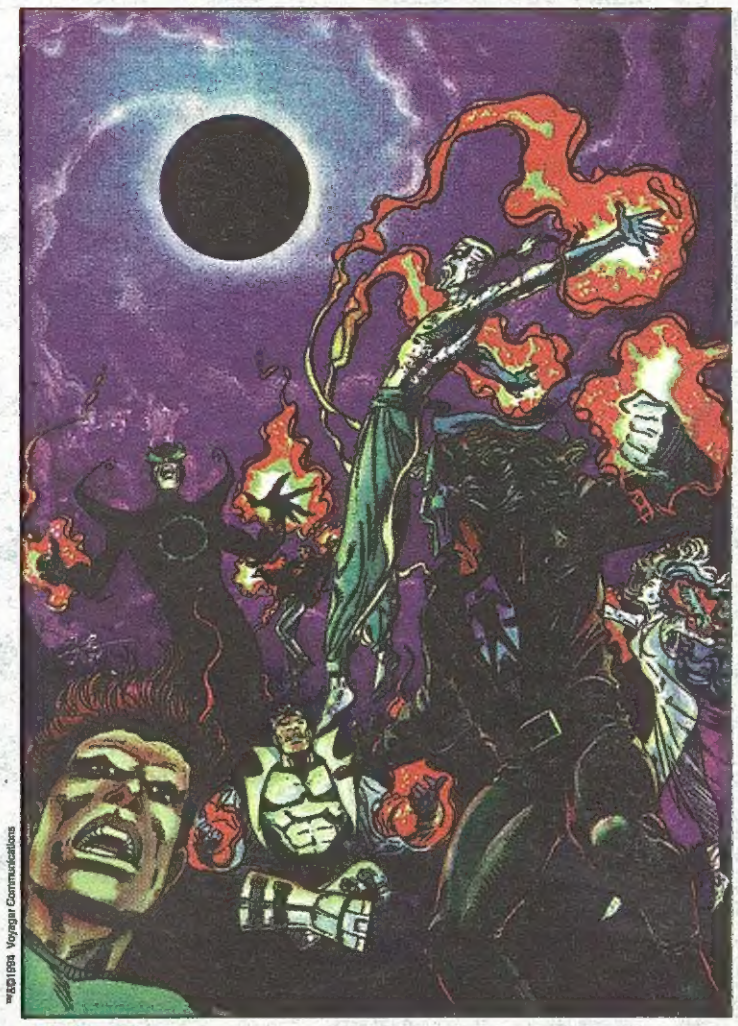
The Comics Journal: Still one of the most controversial and thought-provoking publications in comics.

Valiant

Valiant Comics was the brainchild of Steve Massarsky and Jim Shooter. At one point, the two had hoped to purchase Marvel Comics; when that fell through, they decided to use their market expertise to form a company of their own. Utilizing a combination of classic heroes originally published by Gold Key and original creations from Shooter, Bob Layton, Barry Windsor-Smith, and others, the company began publication in 1991.

Valiant's ***Unity*** crossover series, which tied in all the company's titles in a single massive storyline that resulted in the death of one of their heroes, drew thousands of new fans to the company's titles. This year, Valiant has launched a new crossover series, **The Chaos Effect**, the will lead into two new Valiant series, as well as inspiring significant changes in other Valiant titles.

Jim Shooter left Valiant in 1992 and co-founder Bob Layton became the editor-in-chief of the line. Layton continues to oversee Valiant's line to ensure that the quality is maintained.



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Hot Picks

The Chaos Effect: Valiant's latest mega-crossover series is the company's big event of 1994; readers are excited by the storyline and curious about the changes to the Valiant Universe.

Geomancer: In the aftermath of The Chaos Effect, this new series will introduce a new mystical Geomancer into the Valiant Universe.

Mirage Press

Mirage Press grew out of a single concept: a quartet of martial art turtles. When Kevin Eastman and Peter Laird developed the ***Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles*** almost a decade ago, even they had no idea how incredibly successful their creation would become. Soon, the Turtles became a comic book phenomenon more successful than the entire output of some comic book companies; the heroes gave birth to a line of toys, games, licensed comics, and a series of successful films and an animated television series.

Eastman and Laird remain in charge of the company, although they are no longer involved in Mirage's direct editorial operations. Mirage is developing its own this summer—but of course, the company's primary focus remains the ***Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles***.

Hot Picks

The Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles remains the company's most successful book; the only complaint that fans have is that it doesn't appear often enough!

Bioneers, Xenotech, and ***Stupid Heroes***: These three superhero/adventure titles are the most recent additions to the Mirage line, debuting later this summer.

Topps

Topps, the premiere trading card company, moved into comics last year, premiering with a stunning adaptation of Francis Ford Coppola's ***Bram Stoker's Dracula***. Since then, the company has, under the direction of editor Jim Salicrup, expanded into more movie adaptations as well as superhero titles based on the creations of comics legend Jack Kirby. Topps continues to emphasize licensed properties; upcoming licensed books include ***The Lone Ranger*** and ***Mary Shelley's Frankenstein***.

Hot Picks

The Lone Ranger: Joe R. Lansdale and Tim Truman are redefining the classic Western hero in a new limited series.

Mars Attacks: The comic book series is inspired by a classic trading card series Topps produced thirty years ago.

Defiant

Defiant is the newest comics company created by Jim Shooter, previously the editor-in-chief of both Marvel and Valiant. The company has developed a core line of a half-dozen superhero titles; this summer, Defiant is launching its first major comics event, ***Schism***, that will present hitherto-unrevealed information about the Defiant Universe, as well as bringing changes to several of the Defiant titles.

Hot Picks

Schism: This is both a limited series and a crossover event; the core series will be popular with many readers, but diehard Defiant fans will want every part of the major storyline.

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Other Hot Picks From Various Publishers

Aardvark-Vanaheim - The various ***Cerebus*** "phone books" reprint virtually the entire run of this title, allowing fans an affordable way to enjoy Dave Sim's long-running series without laying out large quantities of cash in the process.

Archie -The Archie titles, featuring the Riverdale gang, remain perennially popular with younger readers; the books are just as entertaining now as they were five decades ago, when the characters premiered.

Caliber - ***Negative Burn*** is an anthology that should appeal to fans of Vertigo and other sophisticated fantasy-adventure lines. Brian Bolland and Bob Burden highlight the line-up of this Joe Pruett-edited anthology; Mr. Mamoulian, the Flaming Carrot, and Kilroy are among the features in the first issue.

Cartoon Books - Jeff Smith's ***Bone*** has become a comics phenomenon, appealing to fans who traditionally don't care for anthropomorphic adventure. ***The Complete Bone Adventures Volume One*** reprints the first six issues of Jeff Smith's delightful series in a single, affordably-priced 144-page volume.

Chaos- An upcoming ***Lady Death*** trade paperback and a new ***Evil Ernie*** limited series will continue to appeal to readers who enjoy Brian Pulido's over-the-top mixture of adventure, fantasy, and splatter-horror.

Crusade - ***Shi,*** the hot new martial arts adventure book, graduates from black and white to color this fall—and that can only increase demand for this already-hot title.

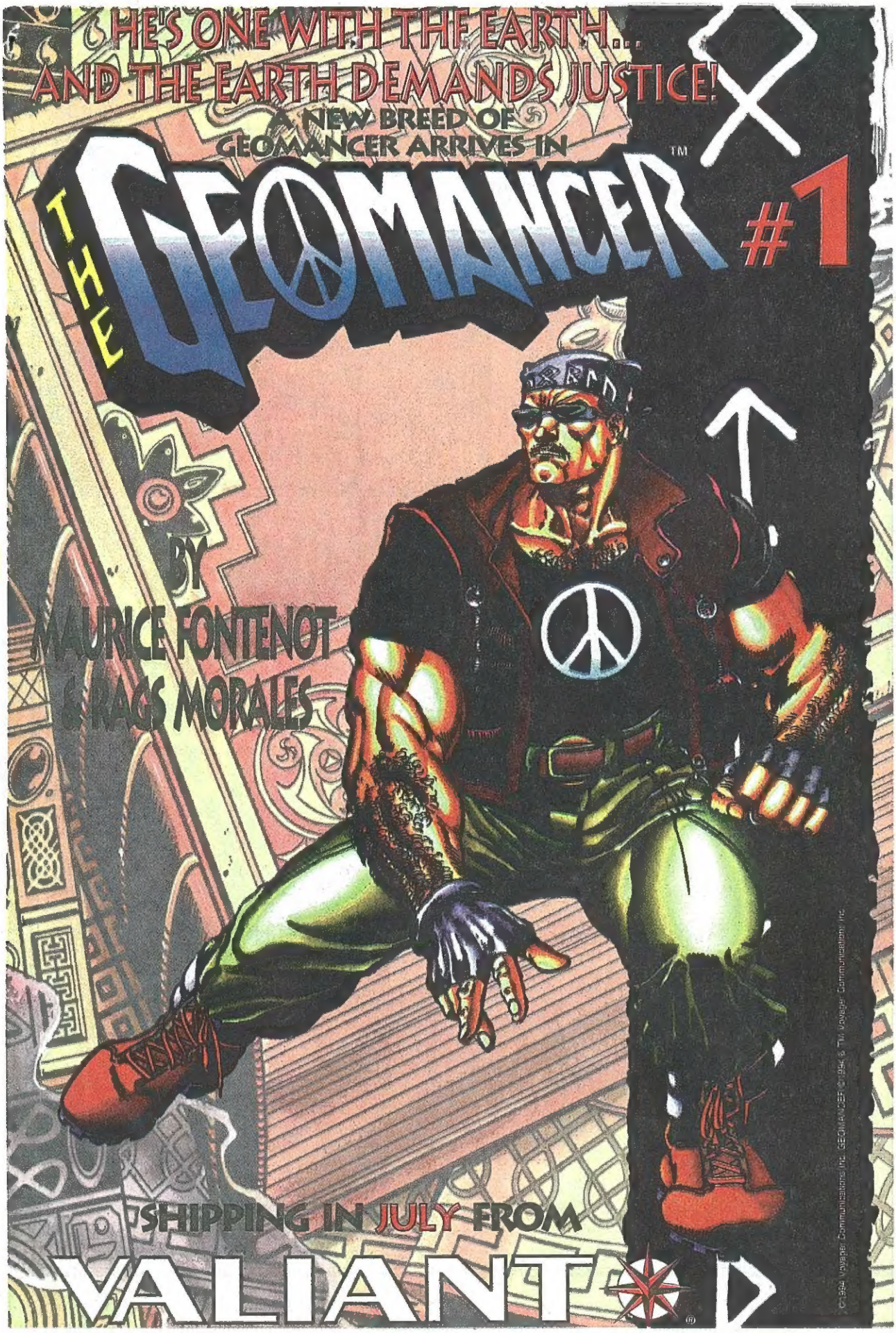
Entity Comics - ***Stigmata,*** a superhero comic with religious overtones, attracted a great deal of attention with its zero issue, creating an eager audience for the miniseries by Migliore and Ienco.

Gladstone ***Uncle Scrooge*** continues the multi-part Don Rosa saga, ***The Life of Uncle Scrooge***, that offers details about the ever-popular Scrooge's early days.

Ominous - ***Brute & Babe***, Bart Sears' popular characters from Wizard, star in a series of comics from this new imprint.

Viz - ***Ranma 1/2***, Rumiko Takahashi's wry fantasy about a boy and his father who undergo rather amazing transformations when doused in hot or cold water, remains Viz's most popular title.

Warp - ***Elfquest:*** Warp continues to appeal to tens of thousands of fans with its unique blend of fantastic adventure and believable characterization; there are currently five ***Elfquest*** titles, with a sixth on the way later this year.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